

For Immediate Release
December 12, 2001

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New State Program Enables Offenders to Gain Life, Work Skills

CHILLICOTHE – The Missouri Division of Workforce Development plans to unveil a pilot program this week that aims to train offenders at the Chillicothe Correctional Center.

A reception and demonstration of the new A+ Computer Repair Certification Program will be held at 10 a.m. Friday, Dec. 14, at the Chillicothe Correctional Center.

This program, operated in conjunction with the Missouri Women's Council, the Northwest Missouri Workforce Investment Board and the Missouri Department of Corrections will provide A+ Computer Repair programs to selected inmates of the Chillicothe center. This facility houses female inmates of all custody levels.

The goal of the program is to ensure the offenders' ability to be employed at a level where they will have a wage and career track sufficient to support themselves and their families when they re-enter society. The success of the program can also demonstrate the positive benefits of reducing the cycle of crime and the costs of re-incarceration.

This innovative 19-week program includes an instructor-facilitated software tutorial program with hands-on practice of classroom material, which enables participants to earn A+ certification in computer repair.

"We hope that this new program will help individuals preparing to leave incarceration soon to make a smooth transition into employment," said DED Director Joseph L. Driskill. "We are pleased to work in partnership with the Department of Corrections to train these individuals in a career that can help them become self-sufficient."

The target population includes offenders who are incarcerated for eighteen months to three years. Candidates for the program will be selected based on an assessment process. Fifteen selected students will work with program staff to develop an Individualized Employment Plan and begin a 19-week training program.

One important objective of the program is its work experience component, which begins with supervised work experience paying at least federal minimum wage and progresses to unsupervised work release in the community with the employer paying the appropriate wage. This is an ongoing, year 'round program.

There is also an Employment Skills/Life Skills component requirement where students master skills such as problem solving, working with bosses and colleagues, attendance, work attitudes, dressing for success, resume writing and balancing life issues.

Upon completion of training and release from the correctional facility, program staff will assist trainees in finding employment. In addition to the involvement of the probation officers, program staff will track the successful re-entry into employment for up to two years.